

Governor's Conference for Women
Opening Welcome
Remarks AS DELIVERED for Commissioner Susan Bass Levin
October 30, 2006

Good morning New Jersey! Thank you Janice, Clarice, Angie, Michelle and our signer Marianne Jacobsen, and to our great Department of Community Affairs dream team who worked so hard to bring this special day to all of you.

I hope you enjoy these words up on the screen – all from famous women. Today is a day of women's stories.

As Agatha Christie said – “The secret of success ahead is getting started.”

So let's get started.

Governor Corzine made it clear to everyone that we have to do more with less – and today we have more, with no taxpayer money, because of the generosity of our Corporate Sponsors.

So first a few more thank you's. (Please hold your applause.)

Our Premier Sponsors stepped up the first day they heard about the Conference, showing their organizations' commitment to making New Jersey stronger – in education, in the environment and in the business and housing worlds.

Thank you to Joyce Powell, President of the New Jersey Education Association; Kathy Ellis, Senior Vice President of New Jersey Natural Gas; and Margaret Guarino, Vice President of Bank of America.

To Verizon – our Breakfast Sponsor – thanks for starting the day out right.

A special thank and a creativity award goes to our Platinum Sponsors. Check out the t-shirt in your Conference Bag, shaped in the State of New Jersey from PSEG, and the umbrella from TD Banknorth.

Now you may clap.

And while you are looking through your bag – check out this CD with our Resource Guide for Women and a Family Pass from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

A personal story –

Long before Meg Ryan made the Temple of Dendur famous, I would take my then young children to museums and we would pretend to live in those far away times and places.

As we walked through the Egyptian section of the Museum, one daughter imagined she was Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile. Until my younger daughter, aged 7, sharply reminded her that had she lived in those times, she would have been a slave.

Oh yes, we have come a long way. But we still have miles to go before we sleep.

Look around you and take the time today to meet some amazing New Jersey women and hear their stories.

- From boardrooms, classrooms, courtrooms, newsrooms and play rooms
- From community centers, financial centers, city centers and family centers
- From drafting tables, operating tables and kitchen tables
- From union halls, catering halls, Statehouse halls and the back hall to the laundry room

We Jersey Girls are ready.

Alice Paul once said – “The movement is a sort of mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone. And then, you get a great mosaic at the end.”

Let me introduce you to the mosaic of Jersey Girls in Governor Corzine’s Administration – with a little story line – and you can get their full bios in the program book.

Please stand as I call your name – but please hold your applause until the end.

Lisa Jackson – our DEP Commissioner, a chemical engineer who hails from New Orleans, with a hip fashion sense and her own political cartoon.

Ginny Bauer - the CEO of the New Jersey Commerce Commission, is the real deal - a Jersey Girl with heart and soul.

Jeanne Fox - President of the Board of Public Utilities, who started her career at PIRG.

Nina Wells - our Secretary of State, who celebrated her wedding anniversary by making a generous contribution to a Newark non-profit agency.

Sharon Harrington - the Administrator of the Motor Vehicle Commission, who loves everything arty.

Lucille Davy - the Commissioner of Education, who followed in her father's footsteps when she became a teacher (she's a lawyer too).

And from the Governor's Front Office:

Heather Howard - the Governor's Policy Counsel, a brilliant lawyer, who worked for Hillary Rodham Clinton and Janet Reno before becoming an adopted Jersey Girl.

Ivette Mendez - the Governor's Communications Director, once a Ledger reporter.

Jeannine La Rue – Deputy Chief of Staff for Appointments, Constituency Relations and Intergovernmental Affairs – is really from South Jersey.

Jane Oates, the Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Ed, honed her skills as a Policy Advisor in the United State Senate.

Patti McGuire – Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislation – knows more about policy than she will ever admit – so don't be fooled. And when it comes to grass roots organizing – there's none better.

Maggie Moran – Deputy Chief of Staff for everything else—has been involved in every political campaign that matters in New Jersey – starting from her days as a Douglass student. There isn't a factoid that she doesn't know – or can't find out. Congress? Senate? Who knows?

From our DCA Family:

HMFA Director Marge DellaVecchia, NJRA Executive Director Lesley Anderson, Office of Smart Growth Director Eileen Swan, COAH Executive Director Lucy Voorhoeve, Director of Housing Lopa Kolluri, Historic Trust Executive Director Barbara Irvine and Director of Local Government Services Susan Jacobucci.

Now, if I introduced all the talented, intelligent Jersey Girls in the Administration, we would miss lunch.

But life is not a soliloquy, and I would like to recognize and thank all of the Executive Directors, Deputy and Assistant Commissioners and Chiefs of Staff and Division Directors – and so on, so please stand.

And please welcome our legislators. Susan B Anthony once said – “There will never be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers.”

It has taken us over 125 years and we still have a long way to go before we sleep, but let's welcome our legislators:

Senators Martha Bark, Ellen Karcher, Diane Allen and Loretta Weinberg; and Assemblywomen Valerie Huttie and Joan Quigley, Sheila Oliver and Alison Littell McHose, Jen Beck, Linda Greenstein, Marcia Karrow, Nellie Pou, Oadline Truitt, Joan Voss.

And Congressman Rush Holt – a Congressman who demonstrates by his presence here today – his rocket science intelligence, his commitment to equality for all, and – his bravery. Thank you.

Mother Teresa once said – “Yesterday is Gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today.”

Let’s remember that.

We are ready to Make our Mark...to have a say...to tell our story...to make a difference.

“I change myself. I change the world,” wrote the poet Gloria Anzaldua. So let’s change the world.

Before I introduce our keynote speaker, let me set the stage for the day by sharing my story.

I am the granddaughter of immigrants who came here poor and uneducated. Strangers in a strange land. I went to college and law school. Studied hard. Worked as a lawyer. Drove carpools and raised two children. Served as Mayor of Cherry Hill for 14 years. Lost an election for Congress. Learned there’s no crying in baseball. Served in the Cabinet of three Governors. Attended four Presidential Conventions. Lost all my hair for a while. And I am going to be a grandmother.

And along the way, I came to know that although life is about defining moments, we cannot let the moments define us.

Rosa Parks said – “All I was trying to do was get home from work.”

In the journey ahead, as we get home from work, we must define the moments. It is our story to write.

I remember when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon – and we thought anything was possible. My first official protest was organizing a demonstration so that girls could wear pants to high school. We won – but no shorts or jeans allowed.

The next time it would be about the war. We listened to records and we knew the words to every Beatles song. The war in Vietnam was raging. Four students were killed at Kent State.

I remember the first Earth Day. And the first issue of Ms. Magazine – Click.

It was a time before I knew cancer. Sometimes, I wish I didn’t know now what I didn’t know then. But then, I wouldn’t be me.

Time Passes.

We stared at evil as terrorists crashed planes into buildings and on the fields of Pennsylvania. We learned that nature would not be controlled as we watched the devastation of the tsunami in Asia – and that life could be gone in an instant. We saw the results of corporate greed in the Enron Scandal. We were horrified by genocide in Darfur. We were stunned by government indifference to the destruction of Hurricane Katrina.

But we have also witnessed true bravery and compassion. We have experienced the miracles of science and technology that provide new hope. We have opportunities that our own grandmothers would never have imagined.

And so the question is – Do these moments define us? Or do we define these moments? Are we critic or crusader? Are we blinded by the light – ignoring poverty and hunger down the street? Will we tolerate a government that ignores our voices? Will we be silent?

Along the way, will you stop to hold a child's hand? Or read a good book? Or treasure a friend?

Cynic or advocate? Will you go along? Or will you lead the way? That is the challenge here today.

Whatever our memories and experiences - I think the women (and men) here today share a common bond. We believe that decisions are better, smarter, more thoughtful, more compassionate -when there are diverse voices around the table.

Because we each bring our own memories – our own dreams – our own stories.

Bella Abzug, the Congresswoman with the big hats, announced that “Women have been trained to speak softly and carry a lipstick. Those days are over.”

We can still carry a lipstick and some of us might still speak softly. But our words and our stories are powerful.

That's why we come together today. That's why we share our stories. That's who we are.

Today you will from women young and old, famous and not so famous. Inspirational stories and stories of disappointment. Women who faced adversity and beat the odds. Women who dared to make a difference. Women who Make their Mark.

So get ready.

But first, we recognize a man who knows that women's voices belong around the table.

As a United States Senator, Jon Corzine fought to improve healthcare for women and their families. He promoted financial literacy and access to childcare. And he could always be counted on as a staunch advocate protecting a women's right to choose.

As Governor, those commitments continue. He created a Division of Women and Minority Owned Business Development within the Office of Economic Growth. Governor Corzine invested capital dollars to improve services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. He is committed to a progressive anti-poverty, pro-education, economic growth agenda that will lift New Jersey up.

And Jon Corzine is a man of integrity – a man who “gets it.” A man who lives the words of the great philosopher Janis Joplin – “Don't Compromise Yourself. You are all you've got.”

Please join me in welcoming our friend, our advocate, a man who makes his mark each day – Governor Jon Corzine.